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THE EVERETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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# THE EVERETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## THE SWEDISH PEOPLE OF EVERETT

by

Edith W. Anderson

### SWEDEN'S COLONY IN AMERICA

Sweden's only colony in America established in 1638 along the Delaware River, came to an end in 1656 when "New Sweden" was taken over by the Dutch. Yet those early Swedish colonists introduced the log cabin to America, built the first snake fence, built roads, churches, schools, mills, cooperages, and breweries, and left a legacy in the Delaware Valley of many Swedish place names.

After his arrival in 1681, William Pen used Swedes, who had always enjoyed friendly relations with the Indians, as his interpreters to assure the Indians that he would treat them fairly. The Swedish settlers constructed such sturdy stone churches that six of the original eleven churches they built are still used for services of worship. The "Old Swedes Church" in Philadelphia, built in 1642, has been designated a national historic landmark. It is the oldest church in Pennsylvania.

Between 1850 and 1930 more than one million Swedes emigrated to North America--over one-fourth of the population of Sweden. Most of them settled in the Middle West, especially in Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Kansas, and Nebraska, where they founded Swedish churches, colleges, and newspapers. Now there are also concentrations of Swedes in Texas, California, and Washington. Since most of the early immigrants landed in New York or Boston, those cities had large immigrant populations. Thousands of Swedes settled in the Boston area, and some of them chose

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to make their home in Everett, where they could travel conveniently to Boston, which offered them diverse cultural and employment opportunities.

#### EVERETT'S EARLIEST SWEDES

Few Swedish names appear in the first Everett Directory for 1882. Among those listed are the names of the author's maternal grandfather, Gustaf Erickson, and his son Axel. By the turn of the century Everett's Swedish population had begun to grow: more than three hundred Swedish surnames appear in the 1899 Everett Directory. The most numerous were: Johnson, Nelson, Anderson, Peterson, Hanson, Benson, Erickson, Carlson, Helrich, Lindstrom, Broman, Alsterberg, Jacobson, Larson, Nordstrom, Olson, and Svenson. Other names appearing in the 1899 Directory were Ahlin, Blomgren, Fridstrom, Lund, Hokanson, Lundgren, Moberg, Norrby, Sandberg, Torngren, and Venblad. The influx of immigrants continued in the early years of this century, and by 1920 there were nearly three thousand Swedes in Everett.

#### SWEDISH CHURCHES

The Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Everett was organized on May 30, 1893. By 1931 there were three hundred members. The church at first was served by Swedish-speaking pastors, and the worship services were conducted in Swedish. In 1929 the transition from Swedish to English began. By 1935 English had replaced Swedish as the language used in the church service.

Among the most generous benefactors of the church, which was located on Liberty Street, were Mr. and Mrs. George Torngren. A history of the church was written by Gustave A. Wennerblad in 1943 for the church's fiftieth an-



niversary.

On November 21, 1966 the Bethlehem Lutheran Church merged with the First Lutheran Church of Malden, as most of the Bethlehem Church members no longer lived in Everett.

In 1903 the Swedish Mission Society of Everett was established by a group of Swedish residents, with the assistance of the Swedish Mission Church of Boston. The Society was located at 757 Broadway, in a building that was dedicated to the Glory of God in 1907.

Several Swedish pastors served this church in its early years. By the 1920's English began to replace Swedish as the language used in the worship services. The 1925 confirmation class was the last to be taught and examined in Swedish. A Sunday school was maintained with Louis Carlson serving as superintendant for many years, followed by Harry E. Broman for the past twenty years. The church choir was led until recently by Eskil Skoglund, whose beautiful solo voice added greatly to religious services and festive occasions. Women contributed to both the spiritual and physical needs of this church through the Friendship Circle. In 1944 the members voted to change the Mission Society's name to the Glendale Congregational Church and to assume full support of the pastor.

The Rev. Oscar Lindegren, who had served this church as pastor, was chaplain and superintendent of the former Scandinavian Seamen's and Immigrant's Home in East Boston from 1900 to 1921 while living in Everett, where his four



children attended local schools. Two Everett natives of Swedish ancestry are now pastors: the Rev. Dewey A. Peterson is at the large Second Congregational Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Rev. Robert Jackman is at the United Church of Christ in Upton, Mass.

#### PERPETUATION OF SWEDISH LANGUAGE AND CUSTOMS

The two Swedish churches played a significant role in keeping alive Swedish traditions and customs within Everett's Swedish community. Many persons subscribed to a Swedish-language newspaper, "Svea," which was published in Worcester until its absorption a few years ago by "Nordstjernen" of New York, the oldest Swedish newspaper in America.

Lodges and clubs also played a part in the perpetuation of Swedish traditions. The Monitor Lodge of Vasa Orden met in the GAR Hall on School Street. The North Pole Lodge of Odd Fellows held its meetings in the Odd Fellows Hall. Here they held whist parties, dances, and seasonal celebrations with traditional Swedish food and drink which contributed to conviviality and good fellowship. In 1929, George C. Tornngren was president of the Swedish Square and Compass Club of Boston, which is still an active organization.

#### PATRIOTIC AMERICANS

Although the last war in Swedish history was fought in 1814, and the basis of Sweden's foreign policy in the twentieth century is neutrality, Carl H. Johnson wrote this tribute for the Welcome Home Souvenir Book in Honor of Everett's Soldiers and Sailors:



As a patriotic citizen the Swedish American has always shown his readiness to do his duty. His loyalty in the various American wars and the great numbers of his race that participated in the last and terrible World War and who rendered distinguished service in the battlefields, present a record of which any people in our country might well be proud.

At least three Swedish-born Everett residents saw service in the Spanish-American War. Nils Bengston and John August Brown enlisted in the Navy, and John Ellis Anderson served in the Army. Bengston and Brown later went to work in the Boston Navy Yard.

One of the most renowned American aviators in World War I was an Everett resident of Swedish descent. He was Joseph F. Wehner, whose mother was born in Sweden. Joe was an outstanding athlete during his years at Everett High School. He was killed in action on his twenty-third birthday. Wehner Park was named after him; the Veterans of Foreign War Post No. 834 also bears his name.

Also serving in World War I were the Ahlin brothers, Walter and John, who saw action in France. They participated in three major battles: Belleau Wood, Chateau Thierry, and St. Mihiel. Later they spent a year in the occupation of the Rhine. John was gassed in battle and died from the effects in 1938, at the age of 46.

Two Everett men of Swedish descent gave their lives in World War II. Carl C. Bodvar was killed in the landing at Anzio in January, 1944. His mother, Mrs. Carl Oscar Bodvar, now ninety-six



years old, still lives in Malden. J. Arthur Nelson, whose grandfather had come from Sweden, lost his life in the Philippines on December 10, 1944.

Edward Broman, formerly a sailor, was in the Massachusetts National Guard during the Boston Police Strike in 1919; he died from a fall at the age of forty-two in 1923. His widow brought up their five sons in Everett. While the oldest son, Harry Broman, lived with his mother and was employed in war work, the other four sons--Helge, Howard, Harold, and Herbert--all joined the Marines and served in World War II, and all survived. The youngest son, Herbert, studied law at the University of Maryland and then went into private law practice. He now works for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Earl Anderson, son of the John Ellis Anderson who fought in the Spanish-American War, spent three years and three months as a prisoner of the Japanese. A more pleasant experience was his visit to Sweden five years ago to meet relatives and to find family records of his mother, Hannah Perrson Anderson, that go back nearly four hundred years!

#### BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Everett's Swedish residents have taken an active part in the business and industrial life of the city. A number of them had their own businesses. George C. Torngren, for example, for many years had a plumbing business in Glendale Square and a tinsmith shop on Timothy Avenue. Later, in partnership with Arthur E. Tiener, he formed the Tiener-Torngren Company, which manufactured air ducts for air conditioning systems. The firm continues today on Tremont Street in Everett as the Roland Tiener Company under the



ownership of Arthur Roland Tiener, the son.

Joseph G. Erickson was three years old when he was brought to this country by his parents in 1878. At the age of twenty he opened a grocery and provision store on Hancock Street. For the next sixty years Erickson's Market was a thriving business. Besides operating his store, Erickson earned a degree at Suffolk Law School to help him in his business.

Andrew Nelson, whose family ran Manhattan Market on Broadway until 1960, had an advertisement in the 1899 Everett Directory for "Imported Swedish Delicacies."

August Beckman, who was born in Sweden in 1865, was the owner and president of the Eagle Shoe Company in Everett.

Anders Olson owned and operated the Progressive Iron Works in Chelsea, specializing in wrought iron and structural steel. His sons, Harold and Richard, who grew up in Everett, own a business for the fabrication of heavy steel products in Winthrop, Maine.

Ehard Johnson founded the Johnson Candy Corporation in 1925, assisted by his wife, the former Lillian Benson; both are Everett natives. They produce choice candies for Boston's most prestigious shops.

Aron Ahlin, who came to this country in 1892 and settled in Everett, was an interior decorator and craftsman, as was his son Hilmar, who was in business with him. Among their clients were the Everett Trust Company, the Provident Institution for Savings, and Dartmouth College, and also Charles Sumner



Bird, whose home in East Walpole they decorated; they also worked on a number of theaters and churches.

William Charles Foberg had an auto body workshop in Malden. His son, William N. Foberg, founded Foberg Welding Supply, Inc. of Everett.

Edwin Ahlin, and now his nephew, George Ahlin, both pharmacists, have owned and operated Harding Drug on Broadway since 1948. Edwin Ahlin is one of Everett's most civic-minded citizens. He is a trustee of the Whidden Memorial Hospital, serving on the board of management and the building commission for the new garage. He is a former president of the Visiting Nurse Association and is on the board of both the Everett Foundation for the Aged and Everett Health Care. He is an honorary trustee of the Everett Savings Bank and has served on the board of investment.

Miss Ella Ahlin, a life-long Everett resident, was for forty-four years a secretary with the Bethlehem Steel Corporation in Boston until her retirement. The author of this treatise appreciates her typing various drafts of this research and also her supplying facts about Aron Ahlin and his descendants.

Immigrants from Sweden, a country with 99 percent literacy rate, had to learn English as their second language. They quickly found gainful employment because Swedes are capable artisans known for their integrity and industry. The Swedes who settled in Everett encouraged their children to pursue their schooling through high school and beyond. It was often possible for these young people to secure a college education while living at home because of Everett's proximity to Boston, with her many institutions of higher learning.



Of the educational institutions in the Greater Boston area, Northeastern University has attracted the largest number of Everett students of Swedish ancestry. Northeastern degrees have been earned by Clarence Peterson, Nils Bernard Bengston, Elmer E. Forslind, Oscar Swanson, Allan Hanson, Arthur Martensen, Karl Martensen, Alvard Erickson, Karl R. Anderson, Jr., Carl Gordon Erickson, and others.

Innumerable Everett High School graduates from Swedish families have developed their inherent mechanical aptitudes at Wentworth Institute and College of Technology, in both the day and the evening programs. Oscar Nelson, who had been president of the student council at Everett High School, studied at the Hawley School of Engineering. He became an engineer with New England Coke.

Carl J. Wennerblad was valedictorian of the Class of 1920 at Everett High School. He received the Warren H. Cudworth Scholarship and also a Harvard Club of Boston scholarship which enabled him to go directly to Harvard College. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year at Harvard and received his S.B. degree magna cum laude in 1924. He held various executive positions in business until he retired in 1972. His daughter Esther earned her B.S. degree at Smith College in 1949, and his daughter Sonia graduated from Katherine Gibbs.

Robert Edward Erickson is an Everett native whose parents were American-born and all of whose forbears were Swedish. While a student at Everett High School he received an honorable mention in the Westinghouse Science



Talent Search. He was an honor graduate of Everett High, Class of 1944, and was the recipient of the Rockwood Service Award sponsored by the Everett Rotary Club. After graduating from Everett High School he served in the Naval Reserve until 1946; at the time of his discharge he held the rank of technician's mate second class. From 1946 to 1950 he attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was on the dean's list at MIT for eight semesters and was also a member of Sigma Xi, an honorary fraternity. He received his B.S. degree in organic chemistry. In 1952 he returned to MIT for graduate study, and four years later he received his Ph.D. degree in organic chemistry. He has been senior chemist at Merck & Co., Inc. and is now associate director of research with Givoudean Corporation in Clifton, New Jersey. Dr. Erickson's wife, the former Astrid M. Ohlson of Everett, earned her B.A. degree in English with honors at Rutgers University.

The nursing profession attracted several Everett young ladies of Swedish descent. Astrid Martensen took her training in nursing at Massachusetts General Hospital and later married Dr. W. S. Winn. Lillian Lind trained at Whidden Hospital, where she later became supervisor; she is now married to Dr. Albert Davidson. Anna Mellon served as an Army nurse; she is now retired.

The author of this article earned her bachelor's degree at Boston University College of Liberal Arts. Another Boston University graduate is Lois Johnson, who holds the M.S. degree in journalism from Boston University's School of Public Communications. She has been with WGBH as producer and administrator for seventeen years, during which time she has traveled all over the United States. Her latest production, called "REBOP," is a multi-cultural, multi-racial program for teenagers.



There have been several teachers of Swedish descent in the Everett public schools. Gertrude Bjornwall headed the home economica department at Everett High School from 1924 until her retirement in 1965.

## ATHLETICS

In 1914 Everett High School's football team amassed a total of 600 points for the season and held all of its opponents scoreless. On that legendary squad were four players of Swedish descent: Karl H. "Pike" Johnson, his brother John H. Johnson, Ehard Johnson (no relation to Pike and John Johnson), and Leslie "Lul" Hanson.

Pike Johnson played left tackle on the 1914 team. After graduating from Everett High School in 1916, he attended Washington and Lee for a year and was named All-Southern tackle. During World War I he saw action in France; he was gassed in battle and was hospitalized for six weeks. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

Following his discharge from the Army, Pike played professional football with teams in Ohio for three years. He then joined the Everett High School coaching staff for a year, and later went into business. In 1920 Pike married Louise Irwin who became a leader of the Massachusetts Federation of Women's Clubs and served as president of the Seventh District. Pike's brother John went from Everett High School to the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a letterman in football. Ehard Johnson was a three-time letterman at Everett High. He graduated in 1916 and saw military service during World War I.

Other Everett men of Swedish descent have distinguished themselves in athletics. Richard Ahlin captained the 1926 Everett High football team. He was an outstanding punter, averaging fifty yards per kick. In 1933 the Massachusetts Humane Society bestowed on him an award for bravery after he saved the life of a man who had



fallen through the ice on a pond in Woburn. "Dick" is still an Everett resident; he retired in 1974 after having worked as construction foreman for Bond Bros.

Richard Ringdahl was the only player of Swedish descent to play on the 1945 Everett High School football team, the state champions. He is the son of Corinne (Berggren) Ringdahl, who grew up in "The Village."

Ralph Colson coached the great Everett High School track teams of 1930, '31, and '32, teams that won state and New England championships.

William Berglund was an outstanding goalie for Everett High's hockey team in the early 1960's. He was named All-American small college goalie while playing for Boston State College, then spent two years in the farm system of the Montreal Canadiens and three years with the New England Whalers. He now teaches at Parlin Junior High School.

Henry Ahlin was active in skeet shooting from its inception. He managed the West Everett Gun Club, which was located on the site now occupied by General Electric, and transformed it into the first proving grounds for the National Skeet Shooting Association, of which he was secretary and then president. He attended tournaments throughout the United States. He was editor of "Skeet Shooting News" for Hunting and Fishing and National Sportsman magazines.

#### THE ARTS AND OTHER FIELDS

Swedes have always found their greatest in-



spiration in nature, and their most cherished outlet for artistic expression in music. Swedes love to sing, especially in church choirs and other choral groups. They play many instruments, yet often their folk dances have been accompanied by just an accordion and violin.

Elias B. Forslind had perhaps the most active involvement in music of any Swede in Everett. Not only could he be heard whistling all day long in his tailor shop, but he organized several singing groups, such as the Triangle Male Chorus, composed of singers from Boston, Providence, and Worcester, as part of the American Union of Swedish Singers, whose purpose was to promote Swedish male chorus singing in America. He also founded "The Vikings," a Boston chorus which sang at festivals around the country, including one held on the lawn of the White House. His daughter May Forslind was the piano accompanist for the Everett High School Girls Glee Club and the choral class. Since the age of 16 she has been accompanist for prominent American and European singers and also for various male choruses. She and her husband, Eugene Nelson, now live in Norwood, where she is active in community affairs.

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Roy Nelson, known as "Nimble Fingers," played with Paul Whiteman's Orchestra and later formed his own orchestra. He now teaches voice in Wakefield.

Kenneth Foberg, now in Hollywood with Woody Herman's band, plays several instruments. He is a graduate of the Conservatory of Music in Boston and formerly taught music in Saugus High School.



Arvid Moberger was a violinist with the Melrose Symphonic Orchestra before retiring to Arizona.

The quartet of Koinonia Association of Retired Men of Everett includes Harold Lindstrom and Herbert L. Nelson, both of whom were for many years members of the choirs in Everett's Swedish churches.

A number of Everett's Swedish residents carved out distinguished careers for themselves in other arts and related undertakings.

Frank Victor Colson, who lived on Sammet Street, was a renowned portrait painter and marine artist whose works were exhibited at museums here and abroad. Trained at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' Museum School, he painted more portraits of Navy admirals than any other artist. Colson was a critic and judge for the Everett Arts Association. For some years Colson's canvas of "Christ with Outstretched Arms" hung over the altar of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Everett. In his later years he did portraits of Dennis Gildea, the former football coach at Everett High, and General Mark Clark.

John Sandberg, who was born in Sweden in 1862, was an accomplished craftsman, designer, and cabinetmaker. He came to this country in 1886, lived for a while in Boston, then settled in Everett. Some of the pieces he designed and made while working for two of Boston's leading furniture companies were used in the White House and the Senate and also aboard the ships of the Cunard Line.



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He made replicas of the Santa Maria and the U.S.S. Constitution that were placed in the Capitol in Washington. Other pieces of his are in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Charles Lofgren, whose parents lived in Everett, served as personal aide to Admiral Richard E. Byrd during Byrd's expedition to Antarctica. Pictures of Lofgren appeared in the August, 1930 issue of National Geographic," which contained an account of the expedition.

Walter Ahlin, Jr., who joined the Navy during World War II, has photographed a number of momentous events, including the first atomic explosion and the signing of the peace treaty between the United States and Japan in 1945. He served with Navy reconnaissance during World War II and the Korean War. He spent three winters in Antarctica and made countless photographs of that region. He participated in producing the first color photomosaic of the forty-eight contiguous states of the United States, which appeared in the July, 1976 issue of National Geographic. He was cited by Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. He holds the rank of chief warrant officer.

Barbara Ahlin was a dancer with the Boston Ballet. She was recently honored for her contribution to the arts in Bermuda, where she resides with her husband Douglas Frith and teaches ballet.

Mrs. Lewis Dingee (nee Edith Bengston) consistently receives blue ribbons for her needlework at the Needlecrafters' exhibitions in Cooper Hall. Her knitted and crocheted afghans, crewel pictures and pillows, and fancy lamp shades are exquisite works.



Two civic-minded persons of Swedish descent who worked with the youth of Everett for many years deserve mention. John E. Erickson, a graduate of Springfield College and a Y.M.C.A. worker, was an active member of the Boy Scout Troop 6 committee for forty-one years and a Sunday school teacher at the First Congregational Church for more than a quarter-century. Since his death in 1976 at the age of eighty-nine the youth group at the Congregational Church has been named the John Erickson Club. Mrs. Ernest Bauckman, the former Anna Carlson, was mother advisor of Everett Assembly No. 40, Order of the Rainbow Girls, from 1950 to 1967. She also served as president of the Friday Club of Everett.

#### POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Members of the city's Swedish population have been active in civic and governmental affairs. Elias B. Forslind represented Ward 3 in the Common Council and later served for three five-year terms on the Everett Planning Board. He was also active in promoting the "Townsend Plan," which led to our present social security system.

Joseph L. Larson served several terms as Everett's state representative, then held the position of administrative assistant to Senators Lodge and Saltonstall.

For many years Carl W. Anderson held the post of Sealer of Weights and Measures for the city. He retired in 1957. Emil Lundgren was a member of the Common Council, then City Collector and City Treasurer before seeing military service in World War II.



Olga Moberger retired in 1972 after working for forty-five years in the office of the city treasurer at Ciry Hall. Doris (Fridstrom) McNeil has been clerk for the Everett Retirement Board since 1963. Her grandfather, Andrew Fridstrom, settled in Everett in the 1890's and raised his seven children here.

William R. Ringdahl has served on the Everett School Committee since 1973. During his years as a school committeeman the new Centre School has been built and the addition to the high school completed. He has worked at Everett Stadium for thirty years and is now stadium superintendent, a position formerly held by his uncle, Henry Berggren.

Miss Beverlee Ahlin has worked for Governor John Volpe, former Congressman F. Bradford Morse, and the chairman of the Aviation Advisory Commission in Washington. Her home is now in Washington.

#### LONG-LIVED SWEDES

Natives of Sweden are usually very long-lived, so their descendants often enjoy lengthy lifetimes. Many Swedes do not like to be considered elderly until they are at least eighty.

A goodly number of the Everett residents of Swedish stock have been octogenarians and nonagenarians. Among them are Mrs. Theodore Johnson, ninety-two years old, and her younger brother, Joseph Johnson, who doesn't look his age of eighty-seven. Joseph spent twenty-nine months in the Navy during World War I and has traveled all over the world, except to Sweden, as the chief engineer on large ships. He and his sister reside at 56 Glendale Street in Everett.



Mrs. Carl Oscar Bodvar, ninety-six, is still alert and enjoys watching television and reading "Nordstjernan." She and her daughter live in Malden. Mrs. Bodvar had a large family, and four daughters and two sons are still living. When she was eighty-four she traveled to Sweden and visited three of her sisters who lived there. Another sister, Mrs. Minnie Olson, whose home was on Madison Avenue in Everett, died in 1975 at the age of ninety-seven.

Mrs. Arthur E. Teiner, who now lives with her daughter in Florida, is ninety. And Ernest A. Larson, who lives on Lynn Street, is ninety-one.

There have been other Everett residents of Swedish stock who lived into their ninth and tenth decades. Hilma Johnson (Mrs. Charles) the mother of Pike and John Johnson, died at the age of ninety-eight. Edna Lack, who was ninety-seven at the time of her death, was the cook for the Stone family of Stone & Webster; her neice, Mrs. Axel Lack (nee Anna Nelson) was the cook for Miss Eleanor Sears of Boston for many years and lived to the age of ninety. Ida J. Floberg (Mrs. Carl), who lived in Everett for over seventy years, died in March, 1978 at the age of ninety-three.

Elias B. Forslind and his wife Anna both enjoyed long lives: he lived to the age of ninety-three, she to the age of eighty-three. The same was true of another couple: Carl W. Anderson, who was ninety-two when he died in 1973, and his wife Alfreida, who lived to the age of eighty-seven. Thure F. Blomgren, who had been superintendent of the Mariner's



Home in Boston, also lived to the age of eighty-seven. Jonas Holgerson Johnson reached the age of ninety. Another long-lived couple were Joel Skoglund and his wife Josephine; he was ninety-three at the time of his death, she was eighty-two. Theresa Irwin (Mrs. Joseph), the mother of Mrs. Louise Johnson, lived to the age of eighty-nine.

Otto Martensen and his wife Emelia, whose home was on Glendale Street, lived into their eighties. So did Lillian Chisholm, the sister of Charles Lofgren, who died at the age of eighty-six. Lillian's and Charles' brother, Arthur Lofgren, lived to the age of ninety-two. Perhaps the oldest Everett Swede, however, was Oscar F. Skyberg, who lived to the age of ninety-nine. An active traveller who went around the world several times, he was a resident of Everett for the last fifty years of his life.

#### AMERICANS ALL

In 1979 there are no longer any Swedish churches, lodges, or pockets of Swedes in Everett as there were just a few years ago. Those who are still here are scattered throughout the city. Some are still living in their old family homes. There has been considerable integration with people from non-Swedish stock in recent years.

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Whether descended from America's earliest settlers, or possessors of citizenship papers just granted, we are all Americans, all neighbors, so we can join in singing "God bless America, the land that I love."